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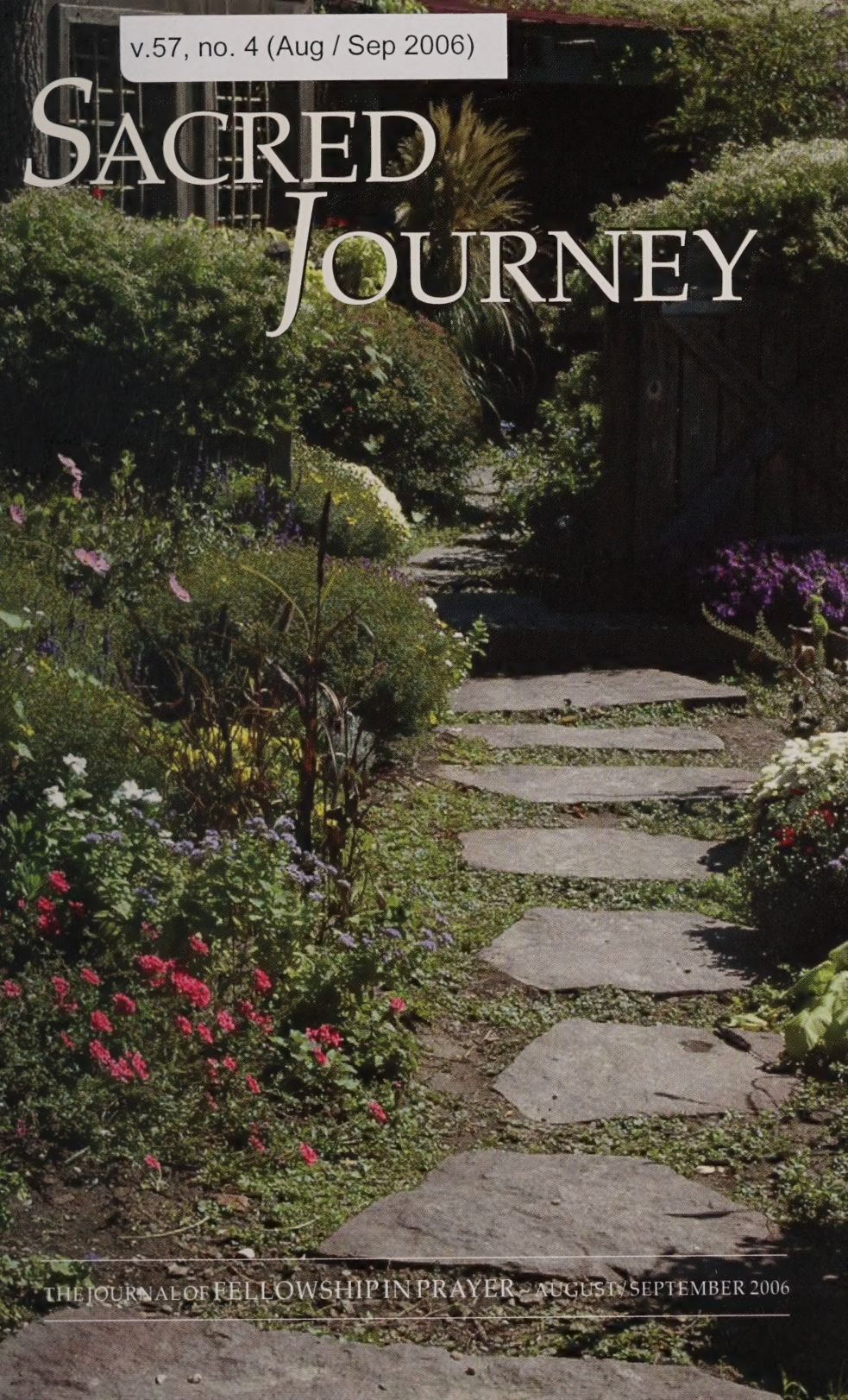

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Cover photo: "Herban Garden" designed by Peter Soderman, photographed by Anne Cornwall

Pain's Pathway to the Sacred

"From the Great Spirit there came a great unifying life force that flowed in and through all things—the flowers of the plains, blowing winds, rocks, trees, birds, animals—and there was the same force that had been breathed into the first man. Thus all things were kindred and were brought together by the same Great Mystery."

~ Geronimo, Bedonkohe Apache

Pain is an amazing tool for fine-tuning one's sensitivities to the blessings and beauty of the Great Mystery, God, Spirit, Nature. This week I've been at home with excruciating pain due to a minor injury, and the wonder of it is that it's given me the opportunity to turn my heightened sensitivities, awakened through pain, to the beauty of the natural world around me and the blessings that fill my life.

From my back porch, I look into a landscape of unending shades of green, punctuated with the rich colors of flowers, earth, and sky. I'm aware of more sounds than I can count: a symphony of insects that grows more complex the more I try to isolate the individual players; birds that add accent notes and trills and occasional solos. The aromas are more intense that I remember since

childhood. Pain has amazing powers of awakening the senses and pulling one fully into the Now of the present moment where life's blessings lie—if one lets it.

Native Americans likely didn't need pain to awaken them to their surroundings. In this issue's feature, Ohiyesa, a leading figure of the Dakota Sioux tribe in the late 1800s and early 1900s, writes about Native American spiritual beliefs and the fundamental role of Nature in all aspects of Indian life. He emphasizes the universality of the Great Mystery or God (pg. 8): "We of the twentieth century . . . know that all religious aspiration, all sincere worship, can have but one source and goal. We know that the God of the educated and the God of the child, the God of the civilized and the God of the primitive is, after all, the same God; and that this God does not measure our differences, but embraces all who live rightly and humbly on the earth."

A most valuable gift of Native American culture, if we would recognize and embrace it, is a reverence for *all* of life, and a state of "awakeness" to the present moment that would fill our lives and our world with the wealth of beauty, simplicity, and peace.

In this issue you'll find stories of people who regularly strive to set aside the busyness of their daily lives and, in each one's own way, to wake up to the sacred in themselves and in the world.

James Donnelly writes (pg. 23): "the extraordinary beauty of God's creation [was] right in front of my eyes . . . but it was the distraction of expecting something more that has diverted me from recognizing and acknowledging the wonder inherent in the reality of God's world right in front of me."

May we not depend on pain as our primary means to open to our sacredness, and yet, when it's inevitable, may we walk through its door to beauty and grace.

OUR FEATURE

The Ways of the Spirit

Ohiyesa

"When you see a new trail, or a footprint you do not know, follow it to the point of knowing." ~ Uncheedah (grandmother of Ohiyesa)

Ohiyesa (1858-1939) was the first, and possibly the only, American Indian to be raised until he was a young man in a completely traditional, nomadic Indian life, to receive both undergraduate and graduate college degrees, and then to dedicate his life to the well-being of his native people.

Ohiyesa was born a Sioux in a buffalo-hide tipi near Redwood Falls, Minnesota in the winter of 1858. At birth he was named "Hakadah," meaning "the pitiful last" because he was the last of his siblings, and his mother died shortly after his birth.

In his early youth, he received the name Ohiyesa, meaning "the Winner." He came of age during a period of increasing tension and violence between Native and "new" Americans. While his father was held captive for several years by white men, he was raised by his grandmother and extended family to become a hunter-warrior. His father, who converted to Christianity while a prisoner, saw

the power of the European culture and was determined that his son should learn to be a "warrior" within that culture. He sent Ohiyesa to white schools with the warning, "It is the same as if I sent you on your first warpath. I shall expect you to conquer."

Ohiyesa, also known as Charles Alexander Eastman by then, graduated from Dartmouth College and the Boston University School of Medicine. He served as government physician at the Pine Ridge Sioux Reservation in South Dakota (and tended casualties at Wounded Knee), as Indian Inspector for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as Indian secretary for the YMCA, and as a founder of the Boy Scouts. He was also president of the Society of American Indians.

By the end of his life, he had published many books, he had worked ceaselessly to promote the well-being of American Indian tribes, and he had been perhaps the most important force in interpreting for the general public the spiritual depth and greatness of the American Indian tradition, then disappearing rapidly.

Ohiyesa was the foremost Indian spokesman of his day. His contributions to our understanding of the American Indian philosophy and religion are so significant that at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair he was presented a special medal for the most distinguished achievements by an American Indian.

He was unique among Native Americans, both completely secure in his Indian identity, and giving himself completely to the search for meaning within the context of a European America. He tried wholeheartedly to believe in the wisdom of each of the ways he had learned.

He believed that the teachings and spirit of his adopted religion of Christianity and the traditional Indian spiritual

beliefs were essentially the same and had their common origins in the same "Great Mystery," a belief that was controversial to many Christians.

While he lamented the passing of Indian ways, he accepted it as the workings of the Great Mystery, and he dedicated his life to the dual task of bringing the ways of the whites to the Indians and the ways of the Indians to the whites. He never lost his foundation in his traditional ways as he explored "the Christ Ideal" and white society. He journeyed deep into the ways of white culture, trying, as his grandmother had instructed him, "to follow a new trail to the point of knowing."

The following are Ohiyesa's writings as gathered and presented in "The Soul of an Indian," a volume within the book The Wisdom of the Native Americans, *compiled and edited by Kent Nerburn.*

THE SOUL OF AN INDIAN

"We also have a religion which has been given to our forefathers, and has been handed down to us their children. It teaches us to be thankful, to be united, and to love one another! We never quarrel about religion."

Thus spoke the great Seneca orator, Red Jacket, in his superb reply to Missionary Cram more than a century ago, and I have often heard the same thought expressed by my countrymen.

I have attempted to paint the religious life of the typical American Indian as it was before we knew the white race. I have long wished to do this, because I cannot find that it has ever been seriously, adequately, and sincerely done. Our religion is the last thing about us that the person of another race will ever understand.

First, we Indians do not speak of these deep matters

so long as we believe in them, and those of us who have ceased to believe speak inaccurately and slightingly.

Second, even if we can be induced to speak, the racial and religious prejudice of the other stands in the way of any sympathetic comprehension.

Third, practically all existing studies on this subject have been made during the transition period, when the original beliefs and philosophy of the Native American were already undergoing rapid disintegration.

There are to be found here and there superficial accounts of strange customs and ceremonies, of which the symbolism or inner meaning was largely hidden from the observer; and there has been a great deal of material collected in recent years which is without value because it is modern and hybrid, inextricably mixed with Biblical legend and Caucasian philosophy. Some of it has even been invented for commercial purposes. Find an Indian who is more concerned with profit than his heritage, and he will possibly provide you with sacred songs, a mythology, and folklore to order!

My writings do not pretend to be a scientific treatise. They are as true as I can make them to my childhood teaching and ancestral ideals, but from the human, not the ethnological standpoint. I have not cared to pile up more dry bones, but to clothe them with flesh and blood. So much that has been written by strangers of our ancient faith and worship treats it mainly as a matter of curiosity. I should like to emphasize its universal quality, its personal appeal!

The first missionaries who came among us were good men, but they were imbued with the narrowness of their age. They branded us as pagans and devil-worshipers, and demanded that we renounce our gods

as false. They even told us that we were eternally lost unless we adopted their faith and all its symbols.

We of the twentieth century know better. We know that all religious aspiration, all sincere worship, can have but one source and goal. We know that the God of the educated and the God of the child, the God of the civilized and the God of the primitive is, after all, the same God; and that this God does not measure our differences, but embraces all who live rightly and humbly on the earth.

The Great Mystery

The attitude of the American Indian toward the Eternal, the Great Mystery that surrounds and embraces us, is as simple as it is exalted. To us it is the supreme conception, bringing with it the fullest measure of joy and satisfaction possible in this life.

The worship of the Great Mystery is silent, solitary, free from all self-seeking.

It is silent, because all speech is of necessity feeble and imperfect; therefore the souls of our ancestors ascended to God in wordless adoration.

It is solitary because we believe that God is nearer to us in solitude, and there are no priests authorized to come between us and our Maker. None can exhort or confess or in any way meddle with the religious experience of another. All of us are created children of God, and all stand erect, conscious of our divinity. Our faith cannot be formulated in creeds, nor forced upon any who are unwilling to receive it; hence there is no preaching, proselytizing, nor persecution, neither are there any scoffers or atheists.

Our religion is an attitude of mind, not a dogma.

The Temple of Nature

There are no temples or shrines among us save those of nature. Being children of nature, we are intensely poetical. We would deem it sacrilege to build a house for The One who may be met face to face in the mysterious, shadowy aisles of the primeval forest, or on the sunlit bosom of virgin prairies, upon dizzy spires and pinnacles of naked rock, and in the vast jeweled vault of the night sky! A God who is enrobed in filmy veils of cloud, there on the rim of the visible world where our Great-Grandfather Sun kindles his evening campfire; who rides upon the rigorous wind of the north, or breathes forth spirit upon fragrant southern airs, whose war canoe is launched upon majestic rivers and inland seas—such a God needs no lesser cathedral.

The Power of Silence

We first Americans mingle with our pride an exceptional humility. Spiritual arrogance is foreign to our nature and teaching. We never claimed that the power of articulate speech is proof of superiority over "dumb creation"; on the other hand, it is to us a perilous gift.

We believe profoundly in silence—the sign of a perfect equilibrium. Silence is the absolute poise or balance of body, mind, and spirit. Those who can preserve their selfhood ever calm and unshaken by the storms of existence—not a leaf, as it were, astir on the tree; not a ripple upon the shining pool—those, in the mind of the person of nature, possess the ideal attitude and conduct of life.

If you ask us, "What is silence:" we will answer, "It is the Great Mystery. The holy silence is God's voice."

If you ask, "What are the fruits of silence:" we will

answer, "They are self-control, true courage or endurance, patience, dignity, and reverence. Silence is the cornerstone of character."

"Guard your tongue in youth," said the old chief, Wabasha, "and in age you may mature a thought that will be of service to your people."

The Presence of Spirit

Naturally magnanimous and open-minded, we have always preferred to believe that the Spirit of God is not breathed into humans alone, but that the whole created universe shares in the immortal perfection of its Maker.

The elements and majestic forces in nature—lightning, wind, water, fire, and frost—are regarded with awe as spiritual powers, but always secondary and intermediate in character. We believe that the spirit pervades all creation and that every creature possesses a soul in some degree, though not necessarily a soul conscious of itself. The tree, the waterfall, the grizzly bear; each is an embodied Force and, as such, an object of reverence.

We Indians love to come into sympathy and spiritual communion with our brothers and sisters of the animal kingdom, whose inarticulate souls hold for us something of the sinless purity that we attribute to the innocent and irresponsible child. We have a faith in their instincts, as in a mysterious wisdom given from above, and while we humbly accept the sacrifice of their bodies to preserve our own, we pay homage to their spirits in prescribed prayers and offerings.

Nature and Solitude

As children of nature, we have always looked upon the concentration of population as the prolific mother

Anne Cornwall

of all evils, moral no less than physical. It was not, then, wholly from ignorance or improvidence that we failed to establish permanent towns and to develop a material civilization. We have always believed that food is good, while surfeit kills; that love is good, but lust destroys; and not less dreaded than the pestilence following upon crowded and unsanitary dwellings is the loss of spiritual power inseparable from too close contact with one's fellow men.

All who have lived much out of doors, whether Indian or otherwise, know that there is a magnetic and powerful force that accumulates in solitude but is quickly dissipated by life in a crowd. Even our enemies have recognized that for a certain innate power and self-poise, wholly independent of circumstances, the American Indian is unsurpassed among the races.

The Importance of Prayer

Prayer—the daily recognition of the Unseen and the Eternal—is our one inevitable duty.

We Indian people have traditionally divided mind into two parts—the spiritual mind and the physical mind. The first—the spiritual mind—is concerned only with the essence of things, and it is this we seek to strengthen by spiritual prayer during which the body is subdued by fasting and hardship. In this type of prayer there is no beseeching of favor or help.

The second, or physical, mind, is lower. It is concerned with all personal or selfish matters, like success in hunting or warfare, relief from sickness, or the sparing of a beloved life. All ceremonies, charms, or incantations designed to secure a benefit or to avert a danger are recognized as emanating from the physical self.

The rites of this physical worship are wholly symbolic; we may have sundances and other ceremonies, but the Indian no more worships the sun than the Christian worships the cross. In our view, the Sun and the Earth are the parents of all organic life. And, it must be admitted, in this our thinking is scientific truth as well as poetic metaphor.

For the Sun, as the universal father, sparks the principle of growth in nature, and in the patient and fruitful womb of our mother, the Earth, are hidden embryos of plants and men. Therefore, our reverence and love for the Sun and the Earth are really an imaginative extension of our love for our immediate parents, and with this feeling of filial devotion is joined a willingness to appeal to them for such good gifts as we may desire. This is the material of physical prayer.

But, in a broader sense, our whole life is prayer because every act of our life is, in a very real sense, a religious act. Our daily devotions are more important to us than food.

We wake at daybreak, put on our moccasins and step down to the water's edge. Here we throw handfuls of clear, cold water into our face, or plunge in bodily.

After the bath, we stand erect before the advancing dawn, facing the sun as it dances upon the horizon, and offer our unspoken prayer. Our mate may proceed or follow us in our devotions, but never accompanies us. Each soul must meet the morning sun, the new sweet earth, and the Great Silence alone.

Whenever, in the course of our day, we might come upon a scene that is strikingly beautiful or sublime—the black thundercloud with the rainbow's glowing arch above the mountain; a white waterfall in the heart of a

green gorge; a vast prairie tinged with the blood-red sunset—we pause for an instant in the attitude of worship.

We recognize the spirit in all creation, and believe that we draw spiritual power from it. Our respect for the immortal part of our brothers and sisters, the animals, often leads us so far as to lay out the body of any game we catch and decorate the head with symbolic paint or feathers. We then stand before it in an attitude of prayer, holding up the pipe that contains our sacred tobacco, as a gesture that we have freed with honor the spirit of our brother or sister, whose body we were compelled to take to sustain our own life.

When food is taken, the woman murmurs a "grace"—an act so softly and unobtrusively performed that one who does not know the custom usually fails to catch the whisper: "Spirit, partake!"

As her husband receives his bowl or plate, he likewise murmurs his invocation to the spirit. When he becomes an old man, he loves to make a particular effort to prove his gratitude. He cuts off the choicest morsel of the meat and casts it into the fire—the purest and most ethereal element.

Thus we see no need for the setting apart one day in seven as a holy day, since to us all days belong to God.

The Appreciation of Beauty

In the appreciation of beauty, which is closely akin to religious feeling, the American Indian stands alone. In accord with our nature and beliefs, we do not pretend to imitate the inimitable, or to reproduce exactly the work of the Great Artist. That which is beautiful must not be trafficked with, but must only be revered and adored.

I have seen in our midsummer celebrations cool

arbors built of fresh-cut branches for council and dance halls, while those who attended decked themselves with leafy boughs, carrying shields and fans of the same, and even making wreaths for their horses' necks. But, strange to say, they seldom make free use of flowers. I once asked the reason for this.

"Why," said one, "the flowers are for our souls to enjoy; not for our bodies to wear. Leave them alone and they will live out their lives and reproduce themselves as the Great Gardener intended. He planted them; we must not pluck them, for it would be selfish to do so."

This is the spirit of the original American. We hold nature to be the measure of consummate beauty, and we consider its destruction to be a sacrilege.

I once showed a party of Sioux chiefs the sights of Washington, and endeavored to impress them with the wonderful achievements of civilization. After visiting the Capitol and other famous buildings, we passed through the Corcoran Art Gallery, where I tried to explain how the white man valued this or that painting as a work of genius and a masterpiece of art.

"Ah!" exclaimed an old man, "such is the strange philosophy of the white man! He hews down the forest that has stood for centuries in its pride and grandeur, tears up the bosom of Mother Earth, and causes the silvery watercourses to waste and vanish away. He ruthlessly disfigures God's own pictures and monuments, and then daubs a flat surface with many colors, and praises his work as a masterpiece!"

Here we have the root of the failure of the Indian to approach the "artistic" standard of the civilized world. It lies not in our lack of creative imagination—for in this quality we are born artists—it lies rather in our

point of view. Beauty, in our eyes, is always fresh and living, even as God, the Great Mystery, dresses the world anew at each season of the year.

The Miracle of the Ordinary

We Indians have always been clear thinkers within the scope of our understanding, but cause and effect have not formed the basis for our thinking. We do not chart and measure the vast field of nature or express her wonders in the terms of science; on the contrary, we see miracles on every hand—the miracle of life in seed and egg, the miracle of death in a lightning flash and in the swelling deep!

Nothing of the marvelous can astonish us—a beast could speak or the sun stand still. The virgin birth seems scarcely more miraculous than is the birth of every child that comes into the world, and the miracle of the loaves and fishes excites no greater wonder than the harvest that springs from a single ear of corn.

Let us not forget that even for the most contemporary thinker, who sees a majesty and grandeur in natural law, science cannot explain everything. We all still have to face the ultimate miracle—the origin and principle of life. This is the supreme mystery that is the essence of worship and without which there can be no religion. In the presence of this mystery all peoples must take an attitude much like that of the Indian, who beholds with awe the Divine in all creation.

Excerpted from The Soul of an Indian. *© 2001 edited by Kent Nerburn. Reprinted with permission of New World Library, Novato, CA, www.newworldlibrary.com or 800-972-6657 ext. 52.*

The Sweat Lodge Ceremony

Susan Gregg-Schroeder

Driving into the dirt parking area, I saw eighteen strangers huddled under a tree, trying to protect themselves from the unseasonably cold wind. Most had water bottles and towels, so I assumed correctly that we were all about to share in the sacred sweat lodge ceremony.

After crossing a creek on a shaky log, we arrived at the site of the Navajo hogan. In front of the rounded hogan was a mound of dirt covered with sacred objects: feathers, stones, shells, rattles. We were instructed by our guide to gather wood for a large fire. He carefully laid the wood atop twenty-eight large, rounded stones. Cornmeal was spread on the ground to connect the fire (sun) with the mound of dirt (moon) and the hogan (earth).

I felt privileged to be a part of this unique group since those who are not Native Americans rarely have the opportunity to participate in this sacred ritual. Realizing this, our guide made the ceremony as authentic as possible, combining chants of the

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Southwest Indian tribes with explanations of the symbolism involved.

The group was diverse. There was a couple from Canada, two women from Germany and a group of eight women from Japan with their translator. The rest of us were "mixed race." As we gathered in the cold around the fire, some of us joked and recalled our scouting days with s'mores to ease the tension of the unknown.

Soon the time came to prepare to enter the hogan. The Japanese group had come prepared and quietly slipped out of their clothes and stood warming themselves before the fire in their bathing suits. The rest of us, not so prepared, shed our layers to shorts, T-shirts and underwear.

We entered the hogan on our knees and crawled around its center in a clockwise direction. The warm inside was a welcome relief from the biting wind. As the ceremony began, seven stones, representing the four directions, the sky, the earth and a center point, were carefully brought into the hogan with a pitchfork. The rocks were placed in the sunken earthen pit in the center of the hogan. Then the flap to the hogan was closed.

Our leader began chanting. I looked around, but could see nothing but total darkness. We were in the womb of mother earth and this womb was void of all light or outside sound. My eyes would remain closed except for the three more times when the flap was lifted to bring in seven additional stones. In the end, there would be twenty-eight stones in all.

For two hours we would drum, shake rattles, sing and offer our prayers to the Spirit from whom we receive our life energy. This Everywhere Spirit connects

us with the land, the animals, the plants and all the two-legged creatures with which we share this earth.

Despite our diversity we were all one. There was a respectful silence as prayers were offered in the native tongues of the persons gathered in the hogan. As each petitioner finished his or her prayer, the group would say, "Ho", and water would be sprinkled on the already steaming rocks.

By the time the flap of the hogan was lifted for the final time, we all crawled out of the womb of the earth soaking wet. We were led to the nearby river to wash in the frigid water. The cleansing and purification of our minds, bodies and spirits was complete. The feeling of deep connection to the elements of earth, water, air and fire would remain forever.

ILLUMINATIONS

Anything we turn in the direction of God is a prayer.
~ *Ignatius Loyola*

There is only one time when it is essential to awaken. That time is now.
~ *Gautama Buddha*

A divine voice sings through all creation.
~ *Traditional Jewish Prayer*

We recognize the spiritual in all creation, and believe that we draw power from it.
~ *Ohiyesa, Dakota Sioux*

And just the moment when you are all confused leaps forth a voice: hold me close, I am love, I am always yours.
~ *Rumi*

God doesn't look at how much we do, but with how much love we do it.
~ *Mother Teresa*

Spirituality is the burgeoning of divinity within the individual.
~ *Silver Birch*

Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.
~*Lao Tzu*

More than all else, keep watch over your heart, since here are the wellsprings of life.

~ *Proverbs 4*

When you arise in the morning, think of what a precious privilege it is to be alive—to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love.

~ *Marcus Aurelius*

Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.

~ *John Muir*

Man's heart away from nature becomes hard.

~*Standing Bear*

I love to think of nature as an unlimited broadcasting station through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune in.

~ *George Washington Carver*

This earth is a garden, the Lord its gardener, cherishing all, none neglected.

~*Sikkism*

If thy heart were right, then every creature would be a mirror of life and a book of holy doctrine.

~ *Thomas* à *Kempis*

Bread feeds the body indeed, but flowers feed the soul.

~ *Koran*

My Unicorn

James W. Donnelly

"Unicorn: a mythical horse-like animal with a single horn growing from the center of its forehead." ~Webster's New World Dictionary of American English

Ever since reading James Thurber's short story about a man seeing "a white unicorn with a gold horn quietly cropping the roses in the garden," I have had the desire to see one myself. It is not clear to me why more exotic mythological creatures, like a Pegasus or a satyr, have not had a similar appeal—maybe it was the domestic image of its eating in one's garden. Whatever it was, the unicorn has been an attraction for me.

Each summer, while at our place in Vermont, I have harbored the fantasy that I might experience the wonder and awe of seeing a unicorn feeding along the embankment of the dam, or in the fields below the converted barn where we live. Each summer I have been disappointed, if that is even the right expression for not having had such a mythic experience.

James W. Donnelly lives with his wife near Annapolis, Maryland, and is a member of the Woods Memorial Presbyterian Church in Severna Park where he is a Stephen Ministry Leader and a ChristCare Leader. He sings with the county's Vocal Arts Society, works on the Board of Education's scholarship program, serves as a spiritual guide, and "retreats" at the family barn in Vermont when not sailing or traveling.

This summer was different. I finally experienced the spectacle I had been awaiting; and what I realized about why it had taken so long was the very excuse I have had any number of times while looking for something I couldn't find: I was looking for the wrong thing.

My "unicorn" was the wonder of the spectacle that I had been experiencing for years: the extraordinary diversity of God's creation right in front of my eyes. It did not have a "gold horn," and it was not mythical at all. As a matter of fact, it was so obvious in its being so ordinary that I had forgotten its wonder: the great blue heron feeding on frogs and minnows at our pond's edge; the ruby-throated hummingbirds nursing nectar at our feeder; the wild turkeys pecking their way cautiously across the edge of the field; the coyote limping to safety behind the dam's spillway; the double rainbow arching from the pine at the edge of our field across the ridge to our left; the stars at midnight sparkling with the fullness of the moon; the lightning and thunder storms that drench our property and shake the barn; the clouds that create patterns above and around the mountain that sits before us at the end of the field; the brilliantly warm sun that nurtures the hay harvest and encourages picnic lunches at the pond.

This listing is but a part of all that nature offers us on a daily basis as we go about the chores of our life here, but it was the distraction of expecting something more that has diverted me from recognizing and acknowledging the wonder inherent in the reality of God's world right in front of me. As I now think about it, this is not the first time in my life that my desire to chase a myth has distracted me from reality . . . and it may not be the last, but I have seen my unicorn at last, and I am the richer for it.

POETRY

Acceptance

Nancy Compton Williams

When your past
comes to live
in the woods
behind your house,
you must go
to the window,
forgive yourself
once again,
and welcome
the creature
that suns himself
on the sill

Nancy Compton Williams, a frequent contributor to SACRED JOURNEY, is a poet and teacher of poetry and serves on the editorial board for Poem.

Last Summer

Chris Partida

I remember looking out my window—
The winds came that day.
Flowers waved in the yard,
A sea of pinks and whites—
A ballet
        and soft laughter.
I also remember the trees high above
And how their leaves touched white clouds.
One leaf floated down—
        an angel, I thought,
Coming to kiss me.

Chris Partida teaches English at North Harris College in Houston, Texas. His poetry has appeared in The Texas Review *and* Black Spring Review. *He has also served as a founder and editor of* No Experience Required, *a small literary magazine.*

Interpreting the Stars

Dan Edwards

What are we not
getting?
Is the universe murmuring in
abstruse symbols
signifying we should do this or
that?
But maybe there are no
symbols.
Maybe stars, the flights of geese,
serendipities, and wonders
are absolutely simple and infinitely
mysterious
both at once, reality announcing *soto voce,*
"Here I Am
I Am
I Am."

Dan Edwards grew up in rural Texas, practiced law in Colorado and Idaho where he represented migrant farmworkers and Native Americans, became an Episcopal priest, and has been a country parson in Georgia for sixteen years while continuing to practice Buddhist meditation.

Touch of the Master's Hand

Betty Spence

Although
we mix the colors,
choose the words,
put the bow to the strings,
nothing much comes of it
until God takes hold
of the brush, the pen,
the violin.

Betty Spence, a native of Mobile, Alabama, is the author of Reading the Silences, *and of* Pinned-on Wings, *a recently published collection of poetry. She is a retired newspaper correspondent and columnist, and she currently writes and publishes devotional materials and poetry.*

Falling In Love

Barbara Coleman

This morning I woke up to the news. Iraq, the melting Arctic, election results. Then I thought about the dirty laundry, meeting the publication deadline for this piece, bookkeeping, and parent conferences. Feeling frayed and in what I call my state of ordinary consciousness, i.e. worry and anxiety, I got out of bed and began the morning fire drill of getting children off to school with hot breakfasts in their tummies (moms think in terms of tummies), lunches in hand, and smiles on faces. It was a challenge to calm my core and be secure for my children so that I could send them out into the world with joy in their hearts to an insecure and fear-based world. My best response to all of the morning news of hatred and dishonesty in the world is to bring honest and loving children right up through the middle of it.

My life is as full and complicated as anyone's I know. I don't manage a large labor force, but my husband and I do have our own businesses running a wetland plant nursery, doing restoration work on rivers and wetlands,

Barbara Coleman lives and works in Tijeras, New Mexico with her husband and children. She exhibits her paintings nationally and internationally and her work is in many collections. To see more of Barbara's work, please visit her website at www.barbaracoleman.com.

and I am a professional artist who left behind a University teaching position and regular paycheck to paint as full-time as possible. My day job is to be an artist.

I cannot paint if I am in ordinary consciousness. Ordinary consciousness is not only anxiety-filled at times, but it is filled with duality. There's me, and then over there, unconnected to me is you, and that object, and then the rest of the world. I make awful paintings if I see the world that way. In fact, I make awful days if I see the world that way all day.

So how do I make the awesome leap into non-ordinary consciousness? How to see the world in a fresh way, energetically, and reconnect myself to the whole? I have so much to do and in ordinary consciousness I think my only recourse is to efficiently multitask my way through my day to cross off all of the to-do items on my list.

But I never fall in love on those days and I probably successfully avoided the bare white canvas waiting on my easel too.

I start by stopping. I stop multi-tasking for one. Even before getting into the studio, I just do one thing at a time. I pay attention to the peanut butter dripping off my knife onto the counter as I make sandwiches for the kids' school lunches. I pay attention to the last-minute requests and questions before the children spin out the door. I see my husband steal my coffee one more time in the morning and feel grateful I have this big man to love. I find myself falling in love with what I can never own: the sweeping clouds rolling in over the hill smelling like snow, the blush of my daughter's cheek, the sound of her voice, the hug of my son as he seizes me briefly, "Bye, Mom" and goes out the door.

Multi-tasking never brings me treasures like these.

I head into my studio with my retrieved half cup of coffee and stare at that white canvas. "How you see is what you see," a teacher once said to me (it was Richard Rohr—*ed. note: Richard Rohr, OFM is the founder of The Center For Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico*), and I have held onto those words ever since. For me, painting is a call to undo conventional thinking and ways of seeing. It has allowed me to become freshly aware of my experiences and surroundings. In awestruck moments of being present, the world presents itself as a profound unbroken continuity of energy, colors, and shapes—not just separate ordinary things. Duality disappears. It is in these moments of focus and awareness that I feel most inspired and in touch with my work.

Some of my most profound life experiences have unfolded in silent communion with my painting, thinking with my brushes in hand. The joy and challenge comes for me in interpreting the landscape and painting the richness of the shadows and the vibrancy of the light. I find that the yellows keep getting yellower and the blues bluer as I continue to try to free up the brush and let go. Annie Dillard writes, "Beauty and grace are performed, whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is to try to be there."

Painting for me shifts my consciousness so that I literally see and experience the world in a different way than I ever could in "ordinary" consciousness. It brings me into a wordless present. But it is not automatic or guaranteed that I'll be present just by starting to paint. As I start to paint, I feel the influences in my head as almost physical presences vying for my attention, and

they are highly effective distractions. I call these influences "studio ghosts." If I pay attention to them, I'll paint another flop. The nagging thoughts of what will sell best, or what some teacher preferred, lessen in importance as I continue to paint. One by one the studio ghosts walk out of the studio door. Finally "I" leave and then I am truly painting. Those paintings come alive and in the process, so do I.

I don't advocate painting for everyone. My husband gets so frustrated when he tries that he just wants to kick the canvas or burn down the house or something. It engages his self critic in a monumental way. Walking works better for him, or fly fishing. Drumming works for my son.

What empties the mind and allows you to fall in love? Barbara Kingsolver writes that "it's the same struggle for each of us, and the same path out: the utterly simple, infinitely wise, ultimately defiant act of loving one thing and then another, loving our way back to life." In my darkest times, I parse my day into hours, my hours into minutes, and minutes into moments. The moments take over and I keep focusing on them. In the moment is God, no matter what the moment brings to experience. It is never ordinary.

This article also appeared in the January/February 2005 issue of Radical Grace, *a bimonthly publication of the Center for Action and Contemplation (www.cacradicalgrace.org) in Albuquerque, New Mexico.*

The Sacred Hoop

Black Elk

I was seeing in a sacred manner
the shapes of all things
in the spirit,
and the shape of all shapes
as they must live together
like one being.
And I saw that the sacred hoop
of my people was one of many hoops
that made one circle,
wide as daylight and as starlight,
and in the center
grew one mighty flowering tree
to shelter all the children
of one mother and one father.
And I saw that it was holy.

Black Elk (1863-1950) was a medicine man and leader of the Oglala Lakota Sioux. He told his life story and described the spiritual life of the Sioux in the books Black Elk Speaks *and* In the Sacred Pipe.

At All Times and Places

Judah Halevi

Creator, where shall I find you?
All hidden and exalted is your place.
And where shall I not find you?
Full of your glory is the infinite space.

I have sought your nearness,
with all my heart I called you
and going out to meet you
I found you coming to meet me.

Love God Now

Ste. Thérèse of Lisieux

Every heaviness lifted from you,
Every hope blooming,
Every moment here and now,
and absolutely
meant to be.

Judah Halevi, known as the "Sweet Singer of Zion," was a Spanish philosopher and Hebrew poet who was born in the eleventh century. Many of his poems, including the well known "Ode to Zion," were paeans to Israel and considered the expression of a deeply religious soul.

Born in France in 1873, Thérèse of Lisieux became a Carmelite nun at the age of 15. She was known as "The Little Flower of Jesus," and wrote her autobiography, Story of a Soul, *before she died of tuberculosis at the age of 24. She was canonized in 1925 by Pope Pius XI.*

Kite Dancer

Kent Nerburn

"Once you have flown, you will walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward." ~Leonardo da Vinci

The sky above the park is alive with kites. It is a breezy spring day, and the children are out.

This is a rare occurrence, for kites live best where the spaces are great and the sky looms larger than the land, beckoning the children to look upward and send their dreams flying toward the heavens. Ours is a place of lakes and woods and deep winter snows. Children keep their eyes close to the earth, and send their dreams racing down rivulets of melting waters, or sliding across drifts, or skipping on stones across the shimmering surfaces of lakes.

But on rare days like this, when the sky is both gentle and playful, it calls to them and they take their kites to the open fields, the meadows, the parks, and the schoolyards and send them skyward to make a playmate of the winds.

Often they fail. These are not children practiced in arts of the sky, and their kites too often spin out of

Kent Nerburn holds a Ph.D. in Religion and Art and writes books that reveal the spiritual dimension of the ordinary moments of our everyday lives. He lives with his wife Louise and his son Nik on a lake near the Canadian border in northern Minnesota. His web site is www.kentnerburn.com.

control, whip crazily in the wind, and plummet heavily to the earth. Other times they never leave the earth at all, bouncing fitfully on the ground behind as the children try to run them into the air on legs too short across fields too small.

But on this day, the winds are gentle and the sky is kind. The kites have risen, and the children stand at the ends of their strings, eyes skyward and attention rapt, mesmerized by this connection with the heavens that they can only dimly understand.

It reminds me of a day many years ago in a very different landscape under a very different sky.

It was 7:30 in the evening on a late spring day in Gallup, New Mexico. The sun was going down in a blaze of orange, turning the surrounding desert into a crucible of fire.

But I couldn't take time to look. I had gotten lost on a side street and was trying frantically to keep my eyes on the road while attempting to decipher the tiny red and blue lines on the map splayed open on my lap.

Louise was nodding off next to me, and Nik, still a young boy, was curled up in the back, deep in sleep. Though I could have used some help, it seemed better to let them rest.

But every turn took me farther from the main street. It seemed impossible. Gallup was little more than a strip town—a remnant of the once legendary Route 66, built to service the needs and hungers of a post-Depression nation traveling from Chicago to Los Angeles. Yet, every turn I took sent me to the edge of some arroyo or into another dusty dead-end street.

My irritation had been building all day. The looming power of Monument Valley and the awesome spiritual

Robert F. Campbell

majesty of the high New Mexico desert had turned me in on myself, and the requests for toilet stops and questions about when we were going to eat or where we were going to stay seemed mundane and intrusive. I was feeling tethered to family and finitude, and it was making me quarrelsome.

Another dead end. Another street fading off into nowhere.

I slammed the car into reverse and roared off in the direction I had come, cursing everything the world had placed before me. I just wanted to get out—of Gallup, of myself, of my family, of my skin.

I raced around a corner, hoping that this was the turn that would get me back to the highway. But instead, I was blinded by a flash of orange light exploding across the windshield.

I jammed on my brakes and shielded my eyes, then eased the car to the side of the road to let my sight recover. All was a swirling blur of multicolored starbursts and flashes. I had turned directly west and, for the moment, my sight had been stolen from me by the blazing desert sun.

Then, as my eyes adjusted and the world came back into view, I saw him.

He was sitting alone in a wheelchair in the center of a dusty, windblown lot. Papers were tumbling past him on the hot desert wind, and small cyclones of sand rose up around him like furies. But he was still as stone. He sat there in that wheelchair like some great Egyptian temple god, hands in his lap, eyes cast skyward.

I watched him for a while, wondering if he needed help. No sane person would go out into that hot dusty lot to sit quietly in its center, buffeted by wind and cut

by the sharp edges of burning blowing sand. I wondered if I should offer him assistance.

But then I noticed something. He was moving his hands ever so slightly as he stared into the majestic evening sky.

I followed his gaze upward toward the heavens. There, almost invisible, I could barely make out the small speck of a kite.

The man moved his hands slightly; the kite dipped and swooped. He moved them again and the kite raced upward. It seemed alive, like a spirit, like a dancer on the wind.

I was transfixed. This man was not an ordinary kite flier. He was an artist, a choreographer. In his hands, the kite moved like a song.

For a moment, I forgot my anger and frustration. I peered more closely, trying to get a sense of this man who could make a kite sing an anthem to the sun.

He had a shirt buttoned up to his collar and a shock of black hair hanging down over his forehead. He was Native American, or Mexican. He had a quiet, almost beatific smile. He had no legs.

Now, I am not a man who asks for miracles. I'm happy when the veil parts for a moment, offering me a glimpse of life's simple beauty. But this was as close to a miracle as I am likely to receive. Like Saul on his horse, God's light had blinded me and thrown me to earth. And like Saul, when my sight was restored, the world around me had been changed.

There before me was a man who was truly bound to the earth and finitude. His was not some illusion of entrapment, churned up in the cauldron of his own imagination. He was the very embodiment of limitation.

Yet while I drove across the great spaces of the West with a wonderful family at my side, complaining that my freedom was not large enough to contain the grandness of my spiritual yearnings, he was reduced to holding his freedom on a string and watching it perform a distant dance on the currents of the wind. Yet it was I who was feeling constrained, and he who was wearing the smile of peace.

I pulled the car into gear and moved slowly out toward the highway, feeling both shame and gratitude. The streets were suddenly not so confusing, the route out not so hard to divine.

I looked over at the man. He had not noticed me. He was too intent upon watching the kite as it dipped and bobbed and glinted against the setting afternoon sun.

I did not tell Louise. Her breathing was gentle. I did not wake Nik. We had miles to go across the growing desert night. But I kept that man in my heart, and he remains there today.

Like the innocent children, watching their kites on this wind-washed spring day, he had turned my eyes toward the heavens. And in drawing my gaze skyward, he had given me eyes to see my gifts here on earth.

Excerpted from Kent Nerburn's new book, The Hidden Beauty of Everyday Life, *© June 2006. Reprinted with permission of New World Library, Novato, CA, USA 94949. 800-441-2100 or 415-884-2100. Web address: www.newworldlibrary.com.*

Talents

Mary Chandler

The young violinist, Joshua Bell, secured his priceless 1713 Stradivarius violin beneath his chin and raised his bow. His fingers flew as the bow danced across the strings. I sat in awe as I watched Joshua Bell and his accompanist, the gifted pianist Simon Mulligan, create vibrant musical poetry for their listeners. Their music lifted my spirits, brought me joy, and touched my heart.

In the program notes I read that when Joshua Bell was four years old, his parents, both psychologists in Bloomington, Indiana, noticed him plucking tunes with rubber bands he had stretched across the handles of his dresser drawers. They got him a violin. When he was 12, he began studying with his beloved mentor and teacher, the renowned violinist, Josef Gingold, who shared with Bell his talent, his sense of humor, his musical inspiration, and his love of music.

My daughter, Carla, sat beside me at the concert, exchanging smiles as we heard Grieg's Sonata No. 3 for

Mary Chandler is a retired teacher who, in addition to freelance writing, is an avid reader and enjoys music and travel. Her work has appeared in anthologies, national publications, numerous smaller magazines and journals, on the Internet, and in newspapers. Mary especially enjoys writing stories and articles that touch the heart.

Violin and Piano in C minor, Op. 45. We both knew that this kind of God-given talent was a rare and special gift. We knew, too, that talents, once discovered, must be nurtured. No one gets a free ride. I thought about how much Carla wanted to play the violin and about the countless hours she practiced as a child. Her playing continues to bring joy to her life and to the lives of others at her home in Washington State.

As I listened to Simon Mulligan's powerful and sensitive piano accompaniment, I thought about my two sons, Michael and Steve, both of whom took piano lessons for a number of years. Sometimes they struggled through their practicing, but they stuck with it, and they still play.

I learned the hard way that playing a musical instrument was not my talent. I also learned that my lessons were not wasted. I still play the piano and the violin for my own enjoyment. Through the talents of others, I've gained an appreciation and love for the kinds of music that feed my soul.

After the concert, the artists greeted us warmly, signed our CDs, and smiled for a photograph with us. Leaving the concert hall, I didn't think I would ever hear anyone as talented as either Joshua Bell or Simon Mulligan—nor would I be as moved. I was wrong.

The following day Carla, her husband, Sam, my granddaughter, Alyssa, and I strolled through Balboa Park in San Diego, enjoying the beauty of springtime. In the distance we heard guitar music—and then it stopped.

As we rounded the corner, a young man, who looked to be about the same age as Joshua Bell and Simon Mulligan, sat on a chair. He wore a straw hat, a

blue Hawaiian shirt, and Levis, but he was not holding his guitar. He had no arms. He nodded and smiled. We joined the other listeners who crowded around him.

The young man's guitar rested on the sidewalk in front of his chair. He curved his toes and began to play, strumming with a pick held between two toes on his left foot and making chords with his right. As he plucked, he lingered on a note and then augmented it by a rapid run on the bass strings. As he played the blues, he smiled, closed his eyes, and tossed his head from side to side. Then, as the warm sun broke through the morning haze, he played the Beatles' hit "Here Comes the Sun" singing at the top of his voice.

"It's too bad we didn't bring our instruments," Sam said to Carla, when they discovered the guitarist also played bluegrass. "With your violin and my mandolin, we could have jammed with him."

More strangers stopped to listen and to drop bills into the open guitar case.

"Every day," the woman who was with the guitarist told me, "he earns his living through the talent that God gave him." She tugged his hat a little lower on his forehead. "It's not easy, but he never complains," she said. "He loves to play for anyone who will listen."

Anne Cornwall

BOOK REVIEWS

Please enjoy these publishers' reviews of books that have recently come across our desk. The first book was co-edited by our former editor, Rebecca Laird.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION:
Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith
by Henri Nouwen
with Michael Christensen and Rebecca Laird
HarperSanFrancisco, June 2006
www.harpercollins.com
415-477-4406

"Read this book and you will understand why I chose Henri Nouwen as a companion on my own spiritual journey." ~Bill Moyers

"[This is] a brilliant addition to Nouwen's canon of work as a writer and will enrich both longtime Nouwen fans and newcomers to his wisdom." ~Publishers Weekly

Henri Nouwen (1932-1996), revered author and priest, understood the spiritual life as a journey of faith and transformation, deepened by contemplative prayer, community accountability, and service in the world. Now, Michael J. Christensen, one of Nouwen's students at Yale and currently a director of the Henri Nouwen Society, and Rebecca Laird, a pastor and one of Nouwen's publishing acquaintances, have developed his standard course on spiritual direction into a new book by Nouwen. By creatively weaving together unpublished

writings and excerpts from previously published articles, they present readers with a fresh and definitive work and literary experience of Henri Nouwen as spiritual director, sharing his wisdom and guidance on how to live the questions of the spiritual life.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION offers a polished and seamless narrative of parables, questions, reflections, spiritual wisdom, and guided exercises, organized around a familiar structure which reappeared in his many lectures and books. Nouwen suggests that three spiritual practices will reorient our lives, opening the door to true spiritual transformation:

Look Within To The Heart: Introspection and contemplative prayer

Look To God In The Book: Devotional reading and meditation

Look To Others In The Community: Relationships with the people of God

Henri Nouwen was the author of *The Wounded Healer; Making All Things New; With Open Hands,* and many other bestsellers. He taught psychology and pastoral theology at Notre Dame, Yale, and Harvard before becoming pastor of L'Arche Daybreak in Toronto, Canada, a community where men and women with mental disabilities and their assistants create a home for one another.

Michael J. Christensen, Ph.D., studied with Nouwen at Yale Divinity School and teaches spirituality at Drew University.

Rebecca Laird, M.A., is a spiritual director, an ordained minister, and currently Associate Pastor for Spiritual Development at Central Presbyterian Church in Summit, NJ.

THE ENERGY OF PRAYER:
How to Deepen Your Spiritual Practice
by Thich Nhat Hanh
Parallax Press, 2006
www.parallax.org
510-525-0101

"The act of praying is not just an empty wish, because behind each prayer there is a practice of mindfulness and concentration." ~ Thich Nhat Hanh

In this wonderful celebration of spirituality, Thich Nhat Hanh envisions prayer as an inclusive, accessible practice that transcends any particular religious or spiritual tradition, and he demonstrates the relevance of prayer in our daily lives.

With a generous spirit that acknowledges the many different types and functions of prayer, he provides a guide for deepening our spiritual practice through the use of prayer.

The Energy of Prayer also provides Nhat Hanh with an opportunity to continue his decades-long dialogue between two of the world's leading faith traditions, Buddhism and Christianity, which was the central focus of his best-seller, *Living Buddha, Living Christ.*

Nhat Hanh, in this book, shows how the energies of prayer and meditation allow us to reconnect with our higher selves while satisfying our basic need to connect with the world as a whole.

He introduces the reader to several meditation methods that present prayer as an open, inclusive, and accessible practice that helps create healthy lives through the power of awareness and intention. He includes breathing and visualization exercises, as well

as a rich sampling of prayers, chants, and invocations from the Buddhist tradition.

The five chapters include: "Does Prayer Work?", "The Object of Prayer," "Heart, Body, Spirit," "The Role of Prayer in Medicine," and "Meditation and Healing." The Appendix includes five meditation exercises, and several Buddhist prayers and gathas for daily activities. You don't have to identify yourself as a Buddhist to use these. They are simply small, everyday opportunities for anyone to return to the present moment.

Here are two of the gathas Nhat Hanh offers:

Waking Up
Waking up this morning, I smile.
Twenty-four brand new hours are before me.
I vow to live fully in each moment
and to look at all beings with eyes of compassion.

Brushing Teeth
Brushing my teeth and rinsing my mouth,
I vow to speak purely and lovingly.
When my mouth is fragrant with right speech,
a flower blooms in the garden of my heart.

Thich Nhat Hanh is a highly regarded Vietnamese Buddhist monk, poet, scholar, human rights activist, Nobel Peace Prize nominee, and friend of Christian leaders such as Thomas Merton and Martin Luther King, Jr. He is the author of more than sixty books, including *Being Peace* and *Calming the Fearful Mind.* He lives at Plum Village, his meditation center in France, and travels worldwide, leading retreats on the art of mindful living.

ENDPIECE

Dun I

James W. Donnelly

In August 2000, my wife and I participated in a pilgrimage sponsored by the Shalem Institute, visiting several of the Celtic shrines in the United Kingdom. One summer afternoon, while on the Isle of Iona (Scotland), I hiked to the top of Dun I (done ee), the highest ridge on the island. The day was sunny but was cooled by a strong wind. At the top I was pleased to find that I was alone. I nestled into the lea of a boulder, to feel the sun more and the wind less, and began to celebrate the day by improvising on my harmonica. In the solitude of a pause I heard a moment of music from somewhere. I was not alone!

I got up and walked around to discover who else might be on the hilltop but saw no one. Reassured, I returned to "my boulder" and nestled in once again. Just as I raised the harmonica to my lips to resume playing I heard the music again and was startled to realize that it came from my own harmonica—a breath of wind blowing through the reeds. It was as if I were playing a duet with God.

As I now reflect on this experience, I wonder, "Are we ever alone?" and "Is not all of life a duet?"

See James W. Donnelly's bio on page 22.

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